

The Evangelical Test

A STATEMENT OF OPINIONS

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CLEVELAND

TO BE READ

The following expressions of opinion and criticism concerning the Evangelical Test have been offered by men, intensely interested in the success of The Young Men's Christian Association, from different states and countries.

Nothing herein contained, necessarily represents the views of the compiler. The pamphlet is issued to set the case as fairly and with as little personal color as possible before the officers of our Associations, in the hope that an understanding of these various opinions may do something toward final unity and concord.

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*Copies of this pamphlet may be secured at one dollar per dozen;
not sold in smaller lots.*

THE EVANGELICAL TEST

What is it?

The first of the following resolutions was adopted at the International Convention of the Young Men's Christian Association meeting at Detroit in 1868.

In order to make clear the meaning of the word "evangelical" and to establish a rule for representation in the convention, the second and third parts were adopted at the convention meeting in Portland, Maine, in 1869.

The italicized words at the end of the second part, were added by amendment at the Indianapolis convention in 1893.

The whole forms what is variously called "The Evangelical Test," "The Evangelical Basis," or "The Portland Resolutions."

I.

(DETROIT, 1868)

"Resolved, That, as these organizations bear the name of Christian, and profess to be engaged directly in the Saviour's service, so it is clearly their duty to maintain the control and management of all their affairs in the hands of those who profess to love and publicly avow their faith in Jesus, the Redeemer, as Divine, and who testify their faith by becoming and remaining members of churches held to be Evangelical, and that such persons and none others, should be allowed to vote or hold office."

II.

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“And we hold those churches to be Evangelical which, maintaining the Holy Scripture to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice, do believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (the only begotten Son of the Father, King of kings and Lord of lords, in whom dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and who was made sin for us, though knowing no sin, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree), as the only name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved from everlasting punishment and to eternal life.*

III.

(PORTLAND, 1869)

“Resolved, That the Associations organized after this date, shall be entitled to representation in future conference of the associated Young Men’s Christian Associations of North America, upon conditions that they be severally composed of young men in communion with Evangelical Churches, (provided that in places where Associations are formed by a single denomination, members of other denominations are not excluded therefrom) and active membership and the right to hold office be conferred only upon young men who are members in good standing in Evangelical Churches.”

Why was such a Test adopted?

Obviously, it seemed necessary to the members of the several conventions to establish some basis which would safeguard the organization against Unitarians, Universalists, Roman Catholics and heretics. The internal evidences, indeed, seem to substantiate the tradition which for years has assigned such a motive to the framers of the Portland resolution.

The paragraph beginning, “And we hold those churches to be Evangelical etc.,” evidently thrusts at the Roman doctrine of tradition, as being of co-ordinate authority with the Evangelical doctrine of the Holy Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. The parenthetical clause in the second section must obviously be taken as a Scriptural polemic against Unitarianism, while the remainder of the resolution beginning with, “As the only name under Heaven,” is an evident attempt to exclude the members of the then growing Universalist denomination, whose tenets were thought to threaten the foundations of the orthodox belief. We, therefore, have as our “basis” for active membership to-day, a phillipic against the non-conforming bodies of forty years ago. It seems to have been a pragmatic necessity.

*Indianapolis, 1893.

What has the Test accomplished?

1. It has, without doubt, increased the interest of evangelical christianity in this special movement for the conversion of young men.

2. It has in many cases, brought to the management and support of the Association, able and wealthy laymen who otherwise would have felt neither responsibility nor interest in the success of the organization.

3. It has kept the movement from becoming a sect.

4. It has kept the Association's relationship to the church significantly before the membership and its control in the hands of church members.

5. The "Test" has given a certain stability and uniformity to the religious teachings of the society, without which it would have lacked consistency and coherency.

On the other hand:

1. It has estranged from membership and support, many whose characters would have brought much in both effort and money to the advancement of the Association.

2. It has restrained in some localities, endowments and large gifts from finding their way into the treasury of the institution.

3. It has prevented successful organization of the enterprise in several important centers.

4. It has encouraged hypocrisy in that, many Associations legally accepting the evangelical basis of organization, find it so impractical on account of local conditions that, in point of fact, they are systematically and deliberately evading it.

5. It has increased the difficulties of college association work almost to the point of forcing a schismatic movement.

6. It threatens to divide the Associations of North America into opposing factions unless remedial legislation is adopted.

The questions for consideration are :

1. Shall we stand by the present statement of the Evangelical Test? or
2. Adopt a purely personal test (like the Paris basis)?
3. Adopt a new definition of an Evangelical Church?
4. Adopt an alternate statement to be substituted where desired by either newly organized or old Associations?

The present situation.

Seven of the leading colleges in New England in December, 1906, requested the International Committee to consider the revision of the test. In compliance, the Committee has authorized the appointment of a commission to study the questions involved and report their conclusions for its further consideration.

Several other colleges and universities await the findings of the Commission prior to their contemplative act of separation from the brotherhood.

In various parts of the country, city Associations are discussing the advisability of changing their membership basis for a more liberal statement, so that a larger number can be admitted to voting control.

The central west shows signs of unrest in both local and college organizations.

The railroad associations seem to be the most numerous in their disregard for a strict observance of the test. Many are known as "Provisional" Associations; that is, they are organized in a manner similar to the regular branches, but ignore the evangelical basis in selecting their boards of directors.

The south seems to be solid in its adherence to the regular formula, while the west is divided in its opinion.

The general secretaries, as a class, are conservative, but in many Associations there are directors whose judgment favors a change in the present standard. This is true in some of the most conservative local organizations.

There has not occurred open revolt to any significant extent, principally because no agitator has arisen to lead an insurrection. When such a man does assume to direct the forces already getting into line, there will be a host of malcontents ready to join in the movement. If the Associations wait for such an event, it will be difficult to cope with the consequences of an uprising.

The question some men are asking is, "Whether it would not be better to give the matter attention while sane judgment can prevail and a just arrangement be effected, rather than delay until united and harmonious action becomes impossible."

Against any change.

Those opposed to a change hold that:—

1. No considerable number of men or Associations desire any amendment. That those who do so, favor it only for the purpose of destroying its fundamental evangelical character in order to admit Unitarians, Universalists and non-church members to participating control.

2. That the success of the present standards, warrants, in fact, demands an adherence to the statement of our basis as set forth in the Portland resolutions.

3. That to change for a less stringent rule would be breaking faith with those who have given large sums for the support of the work and that it might jeopardize endowments and funds left in trust for the various organizations.

4. That the present statement is in accord with Holy Scripture. Therefore we have no right to change truth for sentiment.

5. That if the question of even slight revision should be considered, the floodgates of liberalism would be opened and our foundations swept away.

6. That if any amendment is contemplated, it should not be undertaken until years of study and discussion have better qualified us for wise conclusions.

7. That it would destroy the confidence of the evangelical churches in the integrity of the organization.

8. Several, perhaps many, Associations would feel the moral necessity of withdrawing from the brotherhood if the test were weakened or broadened.

9. A less stringent statement would insure a gradual decline in the positive, evangelistic and orthodox attitude of our several Associations toward the doctrinal teachings of the New Testament.

10. It is the supreme duty of the Young Men's Christian Association to stand impregnable against the attacks of the new theology.

In favor of restatement.

Those who favor change in some form, hold that:—

1. The present standard is largely inoperative. The times and conditions have outgrown it.

2. The desire for reform is wide spread and, unless heeded, will result in serious friction and secession.

3. Four fifths of the Associations in the world are on another basis (Paris) and our attitude is therefore eccentric.

4. The present basis was designed for an emergency which no longer exists. Many, if not most of our churches have changed their theological teachings during the past forty years.

5. The Portland resolution is harsh, narrow, metaphysical and its phraseology erroneous and misleading. Its object is polemic rather than unifying, as shown by its omission of all reference to the Holy

Spirit as the propelling power of our work. Its neglect of the great doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus, as the corner-stone of our faith. Its failure to emphasize the humanity of our Lord's life and teaching.

6. The test as now stated asks, Do you subscribe to a denominational formula, rather than, Are you an honest, earnest, sincere follower of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life and doctrine?

7. The parenthetical clause of the Portland Resolution is a compilation of fragments of scriptural texts, wrenched from their contexts and patched together, thereby distorting their real meaning. As a statement of evangelical truth, it is a distortion, not only on account of what it says, but quite as much because of what it omits.

8. Necessary and persistent evasion of the practical application of the test is becoming intolerable.

Changes suggested.

It has been suggested that in place of the Portland resolution as an explanatory statement of the word "Evangelical," that we follow the action of the Young Women's Christian Association by substituting for that whole section, the words:

"We hold those churches to be evangelical that are entitled to representation in the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America under the action taken by the Inter-Church Conference, held in New York City, November 1905."

Others recommend the following continuation of the second paragraph of the resolution:

"And we hold those churches to be evangelical, which maintaining the Holy Scripture of the New Testament to be the standard and the example of our faith and practice, do believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

From a college man, comes this first rough draft of what he thinks would meet the needs of the college situation:—

"The purpose of the Association is to unite men in extending the Kingdom of God among men. This purpose involves the leading of men to recognize and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, the building up of strong Christian character and the training of men in Christian service. It is our abiding conviction that, 'There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved;'

and therefore that, if this organization is to accomplish its purpose, it must steadfastly acknowledge Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. We believe that the maintenance of this cardinal principle requires that voting and office bearing control be vested in those persons who agree in it. We accept membership in any one of the following churches as *prima facie* evidence of such agreement. We likewise accept a declaration of intention to unite with one of these churches as equivalent evidence. We recognize that there are men not belonging to any church, who personally agree with the cardinal principle of the Association. We accept any one of these as a voting member who signs the following declaration:"

"Fully agreeing in the cardinal principle of the Association, I acknowledge allegiance to Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Saviour and I wish to join the Association in extending the Kingdom of God among men."

"We welcome to membership in the Association any man who desires to identify himself with it."

"Here would follow the usual safeguards as to the name, the requiring of a two-thirds vote of the members present, etc."

2. A prominent clergyman declares that the only satisfactory basis for active membership in the Young Men's Christian Association must be the Apostle's Creed, because of its catholicity and clarity.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was Crucified dead and buried; He descended into hell, the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints, the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life Everlasting. Amen."

3. Several prominent secretaries and laymen believe that the present Evangelical Test should not be changed, because of the endless theological discussion which would attend any attempt to amend it; but that an alternate statement should be adopted, so that newly organized Associations or old ones, for that matter, can choose the statement which seems the best adopted to their local field, as a basis of membership. They propose as such alternate the Paris Basis.

"The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men, who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples, in their doctrine and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His kingdom among young men."

